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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 001060

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SUBJECT: POLITBURO MEMBER WELCOMES CG: GOVERNMENT WORKINGS AND  
TENTH PARTY CONGRESS

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In an initial courtesy call Consul General Winnick asked Secretary Triet about the relationship between the Communist Party and the legislative assemblies; the role of the Politburo in Vietnamese government, and preparations and expectations for the Tenth Party Congress. On the latter, Triet said preparatory work for the Congress in early 2006 were underway. He expected the Party Congress to provide for policy continuity and continuation of broad directives of the 1991 Congress. (Comment: The Party's internal review process over the next 18 months will likely set Vietnam's course for the next five to ten years, a factor we should keep in mind as we orient our bilateral interactions. End Comment.)  
End Summary.

2. (SBU) Newly-arrived CG Winnick met August 12 with Ho Chi Minh City Party Secretary Nguyen Minh Triet, the fourth-ranking member of the Politburo. Triet also leads the HCMC delegation in the National Assembly and CG asked him to explain the role of the National Assembly. According to Triet, the National Assembly operates like legislatures of other nations; issues discussed and resolved in the committees of the ruling party are brought up for debate and passage in the National Assembly. (Comment: Triet's multiple roles as Secretary of the HCMC Communist Party, leading member of the Politburo and leader in the National Assembly blur the distinction somewhat. End Comment)

3. (SBU) This relationship between the Central Communist Party and National Assembly plays out in similar fashion on the municipal level in HCMC. Triet drew a parallel between the national level interplay and his own relationship, as Secretary of the HCMC Communist Party, with the People's Committee of HCMC and the People's Council of HCMC. As secretary of the HCMC Communist Party, he mobilizes Party morale and establishes broad precepts for the local Party. The Party's role is not to run the city's daily affairs, a task left to the People's Committee. Rather the Party's mandate is to promote morale, educate members about their party and ensure that the Party is a positive force in the city. The Party drafts proposals for the broad orientation of policy for the next five years (the Five Year Plan) and submits these proposals to the People's Council for a vote. Within the People's Committee and the People's Council, Party members are expected to apply Party precepts and advocate Party interests. Accountability and reporting from the municipal level to the national level also separates the Communist Party from other Vietnamese political institutions. Whereas the Chairman of the People's Council of HCMC is directly accountable to the Chairman of the National Assembly and the Chairman of the People's Committee reports to the Prime Minister, Triet reports directly to the General Secretary of the Central Communist Party.

4. (SBU) Triet also discussed the role of the HCMC delegation to the National Assembly. The responsibility of the delegation is to represent the people of HCMC and express their concerns and proposals. Triet heads the delegation, which has 26 members, of whom 18 are elected by the people of HCMC and 8 are allocated by the central government. The delegates receive direct petitions from HCMC constituents and listen to their concerns. They then discuss the different ideas of their constituents and determine which proposals should be brought to the attention of the standing committees of the National Assembly. There is normally a month between receiving petitions from constituents and the general session of the National Assembly, during which the HCMC delegation has ample time to debate the issues and proposals brought to their attention. After the session at the National Assembly, the city delegation briefs its constituents to ensure that their concerns have been addressed.

5. (SBU) CG asked Triet to comment on the relationship between the Politburo and the National Assembly, specifically, if the Politburo directly advises Prime Minister Khai. Triet explained that the Politburo only addresses general questions of policy and brings these issues to the attention of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party. It is then the responsibility of the Party committees to ensure that Party members who serve at the National Assembly accurately reflect the Politburo directives at legislative sessions. Therefore, the relationship between the Politburo and the National Assembly is an indirect one. Of the 14 Politburo members, 12 are from the Communist Party Central Committee, and the other two are the secretaries of the Hanoi and HCMC Communist Parties. CG asked Triet if his tripartite role as a member of the Politburo, Secretary of the HCMC Communist Party and head of the HCMC delegation to the National Assembly provided

an advantage to HCMC in the National Assembly in the formulation of policy. Triet did not answer directly, but pointed out that it seemed logical in light of the dynamics of Vietnam for the heads of the local parties for the two most important municipalities in Vietnam to sit on the Politburo.

16. (SBU) CG asked Triet about the upcoming Tenth Party Congress to be held early in 2006. Triet indicated that preparations are underway. In July 2004, the Central Party convened subcommittees to prepare for the Congress. Thus far, four subcommittees have been formed. The first subcommittee-the Documentation Subcommittee- will analyze the accomplishments of the past five years. The second subcommittee, the Social-Economic Subcommittee will set the next Five Year Plan. A third subcommittee-the Party Construction Subcommittee- will both reflect on the past Five Year Plan and look forward to the new Five Year Plan; it will review and criticize the Party over the past five years while mobilizing Party cadres and promoting party spirit and loyalty. A fourth subcommittee will handle logistics, such as travel and scheduling. Triet did not provide a timeline for the work to be done in the subcommittees but indicated that at least two years of preparation was expected. When their work is complete, the subcommittees will forward their recommendations to the Party's Central Committee and the Politburo. Ultimately, the Central Committee will act by majority vote. Triet indicated that the Tenth Party Congress would be open to new ideas in a way that will encourage "building socialism" in Vietnam and was careful to not give any indications that the Party Congress would usher in a new orientation. He explicitly noted that the principles of the 1991 Party Congress would remain the guiding force. CG pointed out that the world had greatly changed since 1991. Triet responded that these long-term guiding principles -- peace and stability and building socialism in Vietnam - have not changed.

17. (SBU) CG asked about foreign observers at Party Congresses. Triet said that past Congresses have invited political figures from other Communist or Socialist Parties from abroad to attend. CG suggested that the Tenth Party Congress consider inviting foreign observers, including Americans. Triet seemed surprised, commenting that it certainly would be a novel idea. He added that, because some invitees had failed to attend in the past, the Party would need assurances in advance that invitees would accept their invitations.

18. (SBU) Bio Note: A southerner and long-time resident of HCMC, Nguyen Minh Triet, 62, has been Secretary of the HCMC Communist Party for four years. Triet is ranked fourth in the Politburo, after the Party Chairman, the President, and the PM. He is considered a candidate to succeed PM Phan Van Khai. Triet also is a contender for the Chairman of the Fatherland Front Committee, when this position becomes vacant in 2006. A progressive force with the VNCP, Triet was the first provincial leader to promote special "red carpet" incentive programs to attract foreign investment and streamline bureaucracy when he was the CP Secretary of Binh Duong Province. Triet is an engaging interlocutor, and appears to relish debate on more controversial topics. He became leader of the HCMC delegation in the National Assembly in late 2002. Triet has good English comprehension.

WINNICK